25: Brodrick--100 S-3 (1939) 1948 Laotians
116, 273, 527, 534, 541

"In May is the Feast of Fireworks, that begins with a decorous temple service and then, after nightfall, the big drums start to throb. All night long men hammer at the buffalo-hide tambours, breaking off only to make the rounds of the village where, at each house, they drink rice-alcohol, and so the Firework Festival goes on, with rockets whizzing in the sky and the bass drums rumbling, a holiday of drunkenness and gaiety prolonged for three whole days.

The Festival of the Great Waters, in July, is not unlike that in Cambodia, but more spontaneous and fairy-like. Then there is the Cake Feast in October and then at the Hunter's Moon, the Festival of the Great Oath.

These are some of the official court festivals in the realm of Luang-Prabang, but the local, village feasts are more revealing of the Laotian as he is. The Courts of Love, singing all night long, and the funerals..."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

we sneaked past we could see a bonfire with a group silhouetted round it. Our passing appeared to go quite unnoticed.

We reached Muong Kassy about two hours later and slept in a large, barn-like Laotian building of thatch and bamboo, which served as the officers' mess. Insects had been at the bamboo and the slightest movement filled the air with a powder which had the effect of snuff. The building swayed slightly with each step, but no more when there were twenty occupants, as there were next day, than when there were only two.

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712 Muong Kassy was the headquarters of a company of Engineers whose job was the upkeep of the bridges. They were uncomfortably isolated here on top of a small hill rising only partially free of the forests, with magnificent views in all directions, which nobody noticed any longer. There was no doctor, so that casualties of any kind might have to wait several weeks for a convoy going in any direction. In the rainy season, when roads and bridges disappeared, the garrison was confined to barracks for five or six months. Outside the stockades the usual straggling collection of Laotian and [273] Chinese huts had formed, with saloons selling 'shoum', a fire-water made from maize. Everything was brought by convoy and was in short supply, except the shoum which was a local speciality. The store-keepers also had a stock of what was described in English on the label as 'fruit tonic'. The fruit tonic was made in Siam and was probably an industrial by-product; but the garrison had found out that shoum plus fruit tonic was more effective than either separately, and that stunned by a good stiff early morning dose of this, the day's boredoms could be better supported. A shoum-and-fruit-tonic relaxed the nerves too. It was after we had been introduced to this Muong Kassy custom that Dupont changed his plans, and quite forgetting about his pregnant wife, and the bicycle she might succeed in putting together, he said we would stay the day, and leave next morning.

Taking a guide from the camp, we went for a dip in the river.

Indigo: RED WOMAN

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[563]

who work gold mines--and by the inhabitants of several regions, whose state of fortune would nevertheless enable them to use a more precious metal.

Jewelry and examples of the goldsmith's art are found in different forms and types which vary greatly with the region and race, as will be seen by the nomenclature given in Chapter IX.

262

Food. The Laotian scorns the pleasures of the table, and is generally a moderate eater and drinker. Steam-cooked glutinous rice forms the basis of his food supply. To this he adds salt, peppers, various other spices, fresh or preserved fish, etc. Besides these, but less frequently, his day-to-day diet may be varied with poultry, eggs, buffalo meat, beef and pork, as well as venison. To be sure, it is mainly on the occasion of public or private festivals, which are fairly numerous in the course of the year, that the Laotian improves on his usual rather frugal fare in this way.

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The customary beverage is water which may be taken directly from the rivers or first be hastily decanted into jars or water-coolers of porous earthenware. In general, Laotians prefer water taken directly from the river to that which has been filtered. Finally, the people of Laos consume rice brandy which is obtained by distillation, and a kind of beer made by cold fermentation of rice mixed with paddy husks.

[527]

The use of these drinks, aside from rare exceptions, is reserved for holidays.

152

Physical appearance, character, occupations. The Laotian's character is, in general, mild, friendly and happy. His physiognomy is [181] open and smiling. Not quarrelsome by nature, he even shrinks from coming to blows in extreme cases and prefers to end a dispute with an outburst of laughter rather than with blows.

Since, all in all, it has few needs and inhabits a land with luxuriant vegetation which is abundantly favored with products to be had for the scavenging, this happy people can easily satisfy its needs and be content with its fate. [Illustration alongside text here.]

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It is assuredly lazy, but out of indifference much rather than out of any deliberate intent. It cannot grasp the advantage or utility of a regular and prolonged effort beyond what is strictly necessary to provide it with a living and a few distractions to which, in reality, its own joyous disposition makes the greatest contribution.

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To the men are reserved the chief tasks, which have a more virile and noble character than those which are the women's lot.

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Then comes the feast. A suckling pig, a hen, a cock, two bowls of cooked rice, two hardboiled eggs, two small jars containing brandy, a handful of cotton threads and lighted wax candles are placed on a copper platter before a kind of altar erected in the middle of the house. In certain parts of Laos cakes and flowers take the place of these offerings, except for the rice, eggs, candles and cotton thread. These latter are obligatory, according to Laotian custom.

[193] The bride and groom kneel down before the altar, and the marriage ceremony begins. An elderly man, a sorcerer, or the man who has been the go-between in the marriage recites prayers and performs certain ritual practices. Then he attaches cotton threads to the wrists of the bride and groom so as to form bracelets. These are supposed to be "fetishes of happiness." Finally the newlyweds pour out a libation of brandy and all those present drink from the same cup after them, passing it from hand to hand.

In families of notables the bride's parents give back part of the dowry to their son-in-law after he has given it to them, as a mark of esteem and great confidence.

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If the son-in-law is to live with the bride's parents then the dowry is decreased in accordance with custom, in compensation for the labor which he will furnish to the community (1).

(1) A custom which is quite widely observed decrees that the groom shall live with his in-laws and help them with their work like a son until the time when he has a child. He is then free to go elsewhere and found a new family home. This custom is extremely ancient in origin and contributes greatly to strengthening the bonds of kinship between the groom and his in-laws.

There are cases, however, where the groom already has a house and takes his wife to live there after the marriage ceremony. The newlyweds are then accompanied by their friends. The young men take along noisy instruments with which they make a great racket, while the young women carry the bride's clothes and bedclothes to her new home.

When they reach their home a celebration takes place in which there is no shortage of brandy and during which the bride runs and shuts herself in her room so as to escape the extremely licentious remarks made by those present, who are somewhat drunk after their many libations.

[522 273]

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boxers pummeled one another with their fists. Their hands were smeared with a mixture of oil and soot so that they would leave a mark wherever they hit. The tilters were hot and eager, but did not greatly hurt one another, for their chief effort was to attract attention by means of gestures and plastic attitudes which would impress the girls and women with their supple, nervous and muscular bodies, shining like bronze under the sun because of the sweat which the effort of fighting brought on.

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Combats between buffaloes followed these amusements, then cocks were brought on and the whole audience crowded around. Passions rose to a fever pitch in the whole mass of spectators, who had been imbibing brandy freely. Ironic clamors rained down on the men who had let themselves be beaten and whose faces were smeared with black on their return, while enthusiastic shouts greeted the victors. In spite of all the excitement, the sun, the heat and the brandy, the whole mass of people remained quite moderate and the festivities [209] [Illustration] [210] [Blank page] [211] always kept a gay and gracious air. The enthusiasm for the fighters, the shouts and the bravos only lasted for a moment, and all of them, both lucky and unlucky, were sponged, given drink and cherished with equal solicitude so that they soon forgot their momentary rivalry.

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Children of both sexes then approached the pyre. They had all fastened their sampots and skirts in view of what was to happen next. Sacks were brought which were full of copper coins, to which a few silver coins had been added. Members of the family of the deceased then climbed up on the pyre and threw this small change broadcast into the horde of children. An indescribable tumult followed, accompanied by sharp cries. There was quarreling and fighting, and many little pairs of hands could be seen grabbing for the same copper coins. All of them would have liked to get the few white coins.

The parents and older people watched the coin hunt, which reminded them of the time when they were children and at the same time reminded them of the name of a dead man whose family had been generous to them once in similar circumstances.

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Now all the ritual ceremonies had been accomplished and it remained only to proceed to the last one: setting fire to the pyre.

Stiff lengths of rattan were attached to the four corners of the catafalque and fastened to the ground with stakes. Rockets slid along the lengths of rattan, and when the time came they would shoot up and supposedly light the pyre. In reality this is only a

village and those of ancestors. Prayers for the dead are said, and 782
when they are over the head and feet of a goat, crude clay statuettes 769
representing two men, two buffalo and two oxen, and numerous wax
candles are placed on a raft made of banana trees. The raft is
launched full into the current of a river while men collect on the
banks and fire salvos of shots and shoot off fireworks.

The musical instruments of the Thais are the "Kene" and [240] 534
a kind of clarinet with two tubes, reinforced by gongs and tom-toms.

Their songs are not at all noisy and are much more like mono- 538
tonous chants.

The Thais have a very characteristic game, and this is the game 524
of the "inexhaustible jar." A jar of rice beer is placed on the floor
of a house and five bamboo tubes stuck in it to serve as straws. Five 273
men take positions around the jar, and each of them puts a tube in
his mouth. Into each of the jars, and above a kind of porous stopper
made of pressed paddy husks, water is poured by means of an ox
horn with a hole in the end. At a given signal both men and women
begin to suck conscientiously while the contents of the ox horn are
poured into each jar three times in succession. The ones who empty
their jar first win, and the losers have to drink the contents of ten
horns of water poured over what is left of the beer in their jar.

The Thai beer does not have a bad taste, and its alcoholic
strength is equivalent to that of hard cider, which it closely resembles
in flavor. Although the additions of water decrease the beverage's
percentage of alcohol it nevertheless produces a slight intoxication,
due primarily to the speed with which it is sucked through the straw.
But the inebriety never degenerates into a quarrel, and provokes
nothing but laughter, songs and unadulterated merriment.

Who would believe that the Thais have the custom of throwing 527
"confetti"? Nothing is more true, however, for in the celebrations
at the end of harvest, which take place in December or January,
the merrymakers throw cotton seeds mixed with paddy, with husks,
and sometimes also with ashes.

149: Reinach--220 G-3 (no date) 1901 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

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The trees also support incomparable wild orchids with strange flowers, and climbing or twining plants of every possible shape and color which are as graceful as they are delicate, which cross, intertwine and with their lianas form an inextricable jungle, a curtain of flowers, stems and foliage which moves at the whim of the winds and is so thick in certain spots that it casts an almost perpetual shadow (1).

(1) The exact nomenclature of these floral species is almost impossible to establish. We shall content ourselves with noting, among many others which are still unknown: the acacia, and principally the farnèse acacia; various kinds of lilacs; the double and single hibiscus, the African marigold and the zinnias, the lotus, the cockscomb, the marvel of Peru, the sunflower, several kinds of magnolias, syringa, camellias, etc.

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Various plants used for food, medicine and dye also grow in the forests, such as yams, taros, ginger, cardamom, annatto, curcuma, catechu (sisièt), Campeachy wood, wild indigo, etc., as well as trees and lianas which produce resins, oil lac, black and red lacquer, damarine (huile de bois), benzoin, wax, gums and rubber.

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Rice and maize are cultivated on the plateaus, low hills, mountainsides and in the valleys, as well as on the alluvial deposits of the Mekong. These form the basis of the natives' food supply and are essential elements in the manufacture of alcohol.

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The banks of the watercourses, which are covered by inundations every year and constantly fertilized by alluvial deposits, are [305] used for the cultivation of cotton, tobacco, indigo, castor oil plants, batatas, peanuts, manioc and vegetables and fruits such as onions, garlic, tomatoes, squash, melons, fennel, mustard, edible convolvuluses, sensitive d'eau, etc. In the gardens which are cultivated near the banks one also finds sugar cane, coconut palms, sugar palms, betel palms, latania palms, the poivrier bétel, the arborescent mulberry, peppers, coriander, mint, the citronella and [Illustration here] purslane. Here also are a large variety of fruit trees: banana trees (more than twenty-four varieties), cinnamon trees, fig trees, orange trees, tangerine trees, grapefruit trees, lemon trees, lime trees, pineapple trees, pomegranate trees, guava trees, mango trees, papaw trees, ebony trees (Diospyros ebenum), mangosteen trees, jack trees, durian trees, custard-apple trees, avocado trees, litchi trees, sapodilla trees (red balata), fayolliers (légumineuses), silk-cotton trees

245

Dry rice may be grown in the plains, but is generally cultivated in mountain rats, for the peoples who consume it are settled in the highlands. Indeed, the Khas are the ones who mainly practice its cultivation. The ratio of total dry rice production to that of glutinous rice is about one to four. 243

It is difficult to give any official figures, even approximate ones --for the reasons given above--regarding the total quantity of rice, whether the year be a good or bad one, which Laos produces. It differs, moreover, from one year to the next because of meteorological variations and also because of the damaging epizootic diseases which recur periodically, decimating the farming animals and forcing the inhabitants to reduce the area of their plantings. [231]

[355] One can, however, given the amount necessary for the subsistence of a family of five, deduce the approximate weight of rice which is indispensable for feeding any given group of people. 262 146

It is estimated that the average yearly consumption by a family of five is 28 piculs of paddy (1,700 kilograms), which yield about 17 piculs of threshed rice (1,026 kilograms). 243

Now the total population of Laos, which is estimated at 470,000, will normally contain 94,000 families of five, or groupings of five individuals of all ages and both sexes. On this basis it is easy to calculate that the amount of paddy needed to feed these 94,000 groups will be 2,632,000 piculs (159,800,000 kilograms) of paddy and 1,598,000 piculs (96,440,000 kilograms) of threshed rice.

In addition to this indispensable minimum merely for feeding the inhabitants, other quantities of rice are also necessary: 1) For fodder for certain animals and for making alcohol, pastry, etc., a consumption figure which we estimate at one-fifth of the above figure, or 526,400 piculs of paddy (31,794,560 kilograms) or 319,600 piculs of threshed rice (19,308,840 kilograms); 2) For seed and emergency reserves. These latter may be calculated at the rate of 5 piculs of paddy per house or per family of five, and require about 600,000 piculs of paddy (36,240,000 kilograms). 243 262 273.

In recapitulation, it is clear that the amount of paddy which Laos ought to produce for food for its inhabitants, fodder for certain animals, the manufacture of alcohol, miscellaneous uses, seed and reserves is some 3,758,000 to 3,800,000 piculs or 226,983 to 229,520 tons, giving an average ratio of 1) 485 kilograms or 8 piculs of paddy per inhabitant; or 2) 2,425 kilograms or 40 piculs per family.

316 begun at judiciously chosen points [Illustration here] they can be accommodated to the existing means of communication and transport
313 if necessary. As for the sums needed to engage in a commercial,
185 mining or forest enterprise, it is difficult to determine these in any precise fashion for, depending on the region and the special conditions of the terrain, such matters may require more or less capital.

[518] For dealing in teak wood (1), for example, the sums needed

(1) A rigorous investigation made by a chief guardsman of the Laotian militia of the region of Xieng-Khong, on the left bank of the Mekong, has shown that the number of teak trees ready for cutting in the province of Muong-Sing is 4,975 in all, 2,000 of which are of exceptional size for the region, that is to say that their diameter varies between 0.3 and 0.6 meter. Counting the young shoots and young trees, the total number of teaks which we possess in Muong-Sing may be estimated at about 20,000.

Another group is situated on the right bank of the Mekong, in the vicinity of Pak-Lay and in the basin of the Nam-Poun. It includes from 10,000 to 12,000 teak trees ready for cutting, concessions for about half of which have been granted. (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, 1900.)

for purchase and transport would depend on the quantity which it was desired to export. As an average indication, the sum of 40,000 francs might be given for operations on 1,000 teak trees.

From the point of view of mineral resources, certain deposits require capital in the millions for their exploitation, while others might be worked profitably with sums varying between 250,000 to 500,000 francs.

433 In the way of industries which may be started at the present time,
185 we may cite only the establishment of rice distilleries in southern Laos and of a mechanical sawmill at Khone.

[273 243] A distillery could be set up without any great expense at the mouth of the Mekong and the Sedone, for example. Thanks to the price of glutinous rice which is five or six times less expensive in this region than at Pnom-Penh, the alcohol from such a distillery would find a certain market in Cambodia.

185 For several years now there has been talk of establishing a
313 mechanical sawmill on the island of Khone which would obtain its motive power from the nearby waterfalls. Besides teak wood (2),
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(2) Teak is generally regarded, although wrongly, as the wood

775 According to the normal cycle of rebirths, when they have ended their stay in Heaven and are on the point of returning to earth, they themselves choose their future parents.

All the thirty-two souls go and haunt the water jar of the adopted household. After the third night, at the moment when the future father comes for a drink, they insinuate themselves into the folds of the belt of his sarong. After remaining there for three nights they will enter the maternal womb by the natural passages at the time of conjugal intercourse.

755 782 When one of these wandering souls leaves the body in order to divert himself, the man becomes ill. In order to [49] cure him, the soul must be called back, and then the Sou Khouan is performed.

When the Sou Khouan is considered necessary, the master of the house goes and consults an achar (pronounced: atiar =sk. acarya), an aged bonze, for the choice of the ceremonial days and hours, where this achar will officiate.

When the prescribed moment arrives, the pha khouan (tray containing offerings) must be ready. In the center of the tray is a goblet artistically decorated with small flowering branches on which are attached tiny candles and white cotton threads about twenty centimeters long. Around this goblet are arranged a boiled hen's egg called khay khouan (egg offered to the spirits), some pellets of glutinous rice, cakes, and ripe bananas.

The tray and goblet may be of wood, copper or silver, the richest appearing at weddings. Instead of a single goblet, several of different sizes can be placed one on top of the other to form a pyramid, and be decorated with flowers, candles and cotton threads.

In addition to the eatables already mentioned, one can also place on the tray a ngeun fac (ancient silver coin in the shape of a parallelepiped weighing 225 grams) or some other precious object.

Next to this tray is placed a small one on which is set a yellow-clawed cock which has been plucked, drawn and boiled. This is the khay khouan (the cock offered to souls). In addition one can add the head and viscera of a boiled pig.

[273] The whole is completed with a bottle of [rice] alcohol and some glasses. In the olden days, the alcohol was contained in a small natural gourd, and the cups [50] were made of bamboo or wood. But rich people had porcelain utensils imported from China. The alcohol can be replaced by a jar of fermented glutinous rice, the liquid extract of which is drunk by sucking it through bamboo tubes dipped into the bottom of the jar.